

SELF PUBLISHER!

★ MAGAZINE ★

IN THIS ISSUE

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BUILDING A CULT EMPIRE!

VIETNAM ZOMBIE HOLOCAUST

A WRITTEN
VIEW

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SELF PUBLISHER MAGAZINE

It is not often that I have sat and had true revelations about where I am at with things and where I could go. But I had them in the course of research for the Distribution Alley column, digging in and seeing what was working—and what wasn't—elsewhere led directly to the conclusion that the solution is in both the past and the future. That the original ideas I had for running an order-forwarding system for other publishers through SP! and through the mail (because there was no internet back then), are now a fully-possible solution with today's online technologies. And all the things I've tried to develop that integrate or work with other systems are actually moot. If I skip forward and implement new technologies, that can only develop to work better and better for us all.

Now, couple that with the fact that our web host was failing. The server we were on was running a hosting setup that the company was moving away from, and so, they were looking at forcing me onto a more expensive model and—as I was reading about what I would need to set up my idea, I found out it would not work the way I wanted on that hosting service. I did some more research, and found a host where, not only would it work, but it would cost a fraction of what the old host wanted to sell me on.

So, I had a URL I wasn't using—happens to be indyfestusa.com—which I've used in the past for a show I put on, and later as a site about indy-friendly conventions. And I've had people whispering in my ear that we need to change the name of this magazine. I asked a few people what they thought about Indyfest Magazine, and it was a unanimous hit. So I set up an account with a new hosting company, expecting to slowly set up things there, while maintaining the other websites at the old hosting, and it would be a smooth transitional growth. But almost immediately after I pointed the name-servers for that one domain away from the old host, ALL the websites started having twice as many unavailable time periods, my emails started acting weird, I wasn't getting things people said they sent, etc. All of which shouldn't happen from the moving of one URL; they even said, "Oh that shouldn't be happening," when I asked about it.

Long story short, it got worse, not better. I ended up yanking everything to the new web host and cancelling everything with the old. So, now everything is working exactly the way I want, but it's not really ready for the public, even though parts of it I kinda do have up and there. I'm calling this an ALPHA version of what I am trying to develop. Jay is getting involved, now that he's back from SDCC and Ellen is, as always, an indispensable tester of things. We have some seriously huge and great ideas and I've invested in some software that will make it all work. My intention is to do no less than change the game, by going back to the past and reaching to the future. Everything I've ever done before, all the trials and errors, have led to what is unfolding right now.

We are going to keep Self Publisher! the same for the rest of this year though, before we adjust its title, format, etc. So, enjoy this issue, and the next few, as the year plays out. I've decided not to pursue the Distribution Alley column; next issue I'm going to do a more simple "Publisher Picks" type of look at creations that have caught my eye each month. Enjoy the articles, Sneak Peeks, etc. While we didn't expect to have to change the websites this fast, everything will become clear as we go. Enjoy the ride!

- Ian Shires



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CULT EMPIRE

ONLINE COMIC BOOK STORE



BUILDING A CULT EMPIRE

An interview with George and Claire Lennox

By Douglas Owen

George and Claire Lennox are living the dream. Three years ago they opened an online comic book store and stocked new and backlog comics. Now, after building a successful eBay business, they are venturing forth and, together with artist James Devlin, are willing to expose us to their unique brand—Cult Empire.

SPI: TELL OUR READERS A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF.

GL: At a young age, I collected a lot of comics, and I wanted to be an illustrator back then, growing up. I always had stories and one night, way back in 1989, watching old movies, I thought it would be great to see zombies in Vietnam. I started drawing the next day and wrote a mini script for Vietnam Zombies. Nothing ever came of VZ, as I went on to do different things, but I still had my original script. When I was in school I always wanted to work in the comic book industry, but after a visit to the career counselors, the teachers told me, and I quote, "Stop dreaming, son; you need to do a real job." I went on to be a mechanical engineer, working in the defense industry, but I always felt I would end up doing something else. Like most people, you get on with life and don't look back on the past then I met my wife Claire in 2007 through friends of friends. We later got married in Italy 2009 and, in 2011 and 2013, we had our two boys, Thomas and George.

SPI: GEORGE, WHAT MADE YOU STRIKE OUT AND START YOUR OWN ONLINE COMIC BOOK STORE?

GL: It was when Claire and I got engaged. In 2007, we were saving hard for our wedding and I thought I would sell my vintage toys





and old comic collection. I went online on eBay and started to see how much they were worth and then I decided I did not want to part with them. But I started to see how much I could get for them, so I bought lots of other people's own collections and then sold them individually and made a profit. After we got married, it wasn't till 2011 that I started Cult Empire, which was an eBay store that sold action figures and backlog comics. We quickly built our business and, in 2012, we created our own website, cultempire.com. Looking back on it, at that time, I felt this was the right time for us to do this. I had learned how to manufacture and, if I could add that formula to creating our own brand of comics, then it would be the way forward for Cult Empire as a company.

SPI: YOU BUILT YOUR BUSINESS ON EBAY DURING A REALLY COMPETITIVE TIME. WERE THERE BUMPS IN THE ROAD THAT ALMOST MADE YOU WANT TO QUIT? HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

GL: When we first started, it was a lot easier to trade, but that soon changed. We had a lot of subscribers who wanted golden age, silver age comics from American comic shops, so we sourced them, because they were difficult to find in the UK. But with the recession, new tax laws, and the price to ship things over to the UK, it became very difficult to make a margin. This was when we moved into stocking all the new releases and started to trade with Diamond Comics. Trading with Diamond really gave us an insight on the inside of how the industry works and why it is difficult for small press to grow. So with my manufacturing background and my experience as a retailer, I felt it was very important for Cult Empire to produce our own brand of comics and, if we are to survive against

the big boys, then we need comics that can compete.

SPI: ZOMBIES. SOME SAY SUCH WORK WOULD BE GRUESOME. HOW DO YOU BALANCE STORY AND HORROR?

GL: One word: LIFE. My writing is always based on real life mixed with my own personal creative madness. At school, I was always very much interested in history, studying World War Two, American History, Plains Indians, the Civil War, and the Vietnam War. In the 1980s, there were a lot of movies about the Vietnam War and I always remember when I watching one of them and my grandfather came in and I said, "This is great." His response was one from a man who served in World War Two, which was, "Don't believe what you see in movies. War is not great." That was something important for Vietnam Zombie Holocaust; when the American soldiers came back from Nam, there was so much hostility towards them, but we will never know what horror they experienced. When I was doing a lot of research on the veterans from both sides of the war, I felt this story had to be told, not by right or left wing views, but by life experiences. The zombies themselves in the story are horror, but the carnage that unfolds is real war and real life experiences. It is funny how the audience or reader accepts gruesome horror when it is zombies in a book or on TV, but when faced with a real-life tale about the reality of war, they will turn the page or switch off their TV. When James read the script and we then had our first meeting about VZH, we decided that if we do this book, not only do we want a comic that can compete, but we want to tell this story in all its gruesome glory, with VZH's own, bizarre, macabre style. It has been amazing working with James, as we come from the same page, and we fed off each other, which made the story a

lot stronger. I really believe James and I have a strong work ethic and we can go on to produce more and more titles. With VZH #1, it really sets the stage, action-packed, and boy, wait 'til you see what is coming... Hell on Earth!

SPI: DO YOU READ A LOT OF COMICS STILL?

CL: I only read comics when I am putting my sons to bed, but it's good for me to obtain as much knowledge as possible, especially when we work comic cons. I now know who's who and what comics are actually good. I read books more, but I have started to read some comics, which I like.

GL: Movies have always been a big influence in my life and I got back into reading comics about 2005, when the movie Sin City came out. Back in the day, I collected Dark Horse Presents and I got into the Sin City run, which just blew me away back then. Everybody at that time would remember Frank Miller for the Dark Knight, but Sin City was way ahead of its time. So, after I saw that movie, I started reading my own collection again. Then I had the bug and started to catch up with what was on the comic book scene. I read a lot DC and Marvel when I was younger, but when I started to read them again, I felt they had lost their origin. So that led me to collect the old EC classics, like Vault of Horror, Dark Horse Eerie, and Avatar Press Crossed. I always liked trying to find something original that I could relate to. These titles take me back to when I was younger, watching the old VHS horror movies, so it was a good feeling getting back reading again. There are so many things in the comic retailer world telling you what you should be reading, but I was never someone who would follow the crowd. By going to local comic book cons and marts, I started to read a lot of local, small press titles, like School of the Damned and Dark Ascension. James Devlin had done the artwork for SOTD and then, he followed that by writing and doing the artwork for Dark Ascension. After I read these books, I really felt this was the direction Cult Empire should be going, so I sat down and wrote a business plan to produce our own comic book titles. When I sat down to write the scripts Vietnam Zombie Holocaust and Horror Show, they pretty much wrote themselves, which was great feeling for me. It really felt right and now, seeing the pages come to life, it is just a joy!

SPI: WHICH COMICS WOULD YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR FAVORITES?

CL: I would say I like the child-orientated ones; they are fun. I certainly don't like the horror, although I am partial to a few vampire stories, such as True Blood, and I just started reading The Vampire Diaries.

GL: To be honest, as a retailer I get to read nearly all the new comics, but I still consider my own original collection the best. Dark Horse





was a big publisher for me. I collected the original Aliens, Predator, Sin City, The Thing from Another World, Creepy, Eerie, and Dark Horse Presents. EC Comics set the benchmark with Vault of Horror and Tales from the Crypt—still a joy to read. Another big influence was a 1991 UK comic magazine called Toxic, which contained stories by Pat Mills. It featured some comic book stories like Marshal Law, Accident Man, Boogie Man, Psycho Killer, and Coffin, that are all still, to this day, fresh, dynamic, real, well-paced storylines, with awesome art to boot. Marvel, I have always loved Amazing Spider-Man, but I always like the bad guys, so I only really collected them when the Green Goblin, Venom, or Hobgoblin were in the runs. Also Tomb of Dracula and The Punisher. I was always keen on them, but they were hard to get, back in the day. DC-wise, the big set for me was always The Dark Knight Returns and also Batman Year One. Again Frank Miller, but it was such a game changer for Batman. There was so much good stuff from early DC, like House of Mystery and The House of Secrets. Ok, I could go on...HA HA!

SP!: CLAIRE, MOST WOMEN WOULD TELL THEIR HUSBANDS TO GROW UP AND STOP WITH THE COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS. OBVIOUSLY, YOU SUPPORTED HIM. WHAT WENT THROUGH YOUR MIND WHEN GEORGE FIRST SUGGESTED OPENING CULT EMPIRE?

CL: As a designer and someone who went back to full-time education to qualify, I was fully aware of how I felt being restricted in the daily grind, not being able to be creative, and wanting to change my life around. I knew that George was very determined, passionate, and knowledgeable in what he wanted to achieve and that was/is exciting. Don't get me wrong, using the house like a warehouse while I was still coming to terms of being a mother for the first time and constantly falling over boxes of comics did create many an atmosphere; nights of sitting, bagging and boarding comics for comic cons and days spent sitting in the house waiting on deliveries while juggling a baby... it's not been easy, but it's challenging, it's an adventure, and I love seeing how enthusiastic he is about the business. Especially now we have two boys, it is our mission to make it work for their futures.

SP!: JAMES, THE DETAIL NEEDED TO PULL OFF A GOOD ILLUSTRATION MUST BE DEMANDING. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY THE TIMELINE IS FROM THE CONCEPT GEORGE GIVES YOU TO THE FINISHED PRODUCT?

JD: It varies according to the type of illustration needed, whether it be a character design, interior page, front cover, etc. Working from doing thumbnail breakdowns of the script to producing a fully colored final page can take anything from 14 to 24 hours, depending on the level of detail and the panel count. I'm always looking to bring my average time down, but some pages just draw you in (no pun intended!) and you end up spending many more hours working on them than planned.



SP! HOW MUCH OF A FREE HAND ARE YOU GIVEN TO BRING THE STORY TO LIFE?

JD: I'm given a big free hand! George has been fantastically co-operative to work with. He has been completely open to any suggestions I've had regarding panel flow and structure. We're singing from the same hymn sheet when it comes to the vibe of the story, so I have a lot of leeway when adding a character's idiosyncrasies, facial expressions, and reactions to any given situation. One of George's strengths is his willingness to let the story breathe by not cramming too many panels onto a page, which is always more fun for the artist. Hell, he even gives me the odd splash page to draw, every now and then!

SP!: IF YOU HAD ONE THING TO CHANGE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

CL: I have seen the work both my husband and James have produced and I wouldn't change anything. In fact, I would encourage them to work continuously in the future, as they both have enjoyed creating this comic and I think it shows through their work.

GL: I think we have created a real amazing comic book that will stand the test of time, so I would change nothing.

JD: Ha ha! Well, seeing as we've barely finished the first issue, it's a bit soon to be giving a retrospective... So far, so good.

SP!: JAMES, BEING AN ARTIST, WHERE DO YOU DRAW YOUR STYLE AND INSPIRATION FROM?

JD: VZH is the first project for many years where I've had the chance to color my own line-work, so this alters my approach from the get-go. It's been great to put into practice ideas that I've had simmering for a long time now, in regard to my work method. Artists such as Eduardo Risso and Frank Miller taught me a lot about the use of black and white. I love all sorts of art styles, from Adam Hughes to Jack Kirby, with many in between. When it comes to coloring I'm more influenced by what I see around me, in real life and also in cinema. Michael Mann's movies spring to mind; I love the cold neon vibe of movies like *Manhunter*.

SP!: CLAIRE, GEORGE, DO YOU SEE YOUR CHILDREN GETTING INTO THE BUSINESS AND RUNNING WITH IT WHEN THEY ARE OLDER?

CL: Yes, definitely. As we are both extremely creative parents, I would encourage them to be involved, but wouldn't insist on it.

GL: Yes, I hope so. They already come to comic cons and our three-year-old Thomas is dying to help all the time. I would not stop the boys on whatever it is they want to do in life, as it's their choice and they need to lead their own lives.



James Devlin

SP!: WHERE DO YOU SEE CULT EMPIRE NEXT YEAR? HOW ABOUT FIVE YEARS FROM NOW?

GL: I see Cult Empire as a worldwide comic label that has regular comics coming out each month. I have 12 titles planned for the next few years, with more and more artists wanting to work with us. It's going to be exciting stuff and I really cannot wait for everybody to read our comic books.

SP!: IF SOMEONE ASKED YOU FOR ADVICE ABOUT GETTING INTO THIS BUSINESS, WHAT WOULD YOU TELL THEM?

CL: Be realistic about costs and overheads, stay focused, and don't give up. Knowledge is king; do your research and work with people you value and respect.

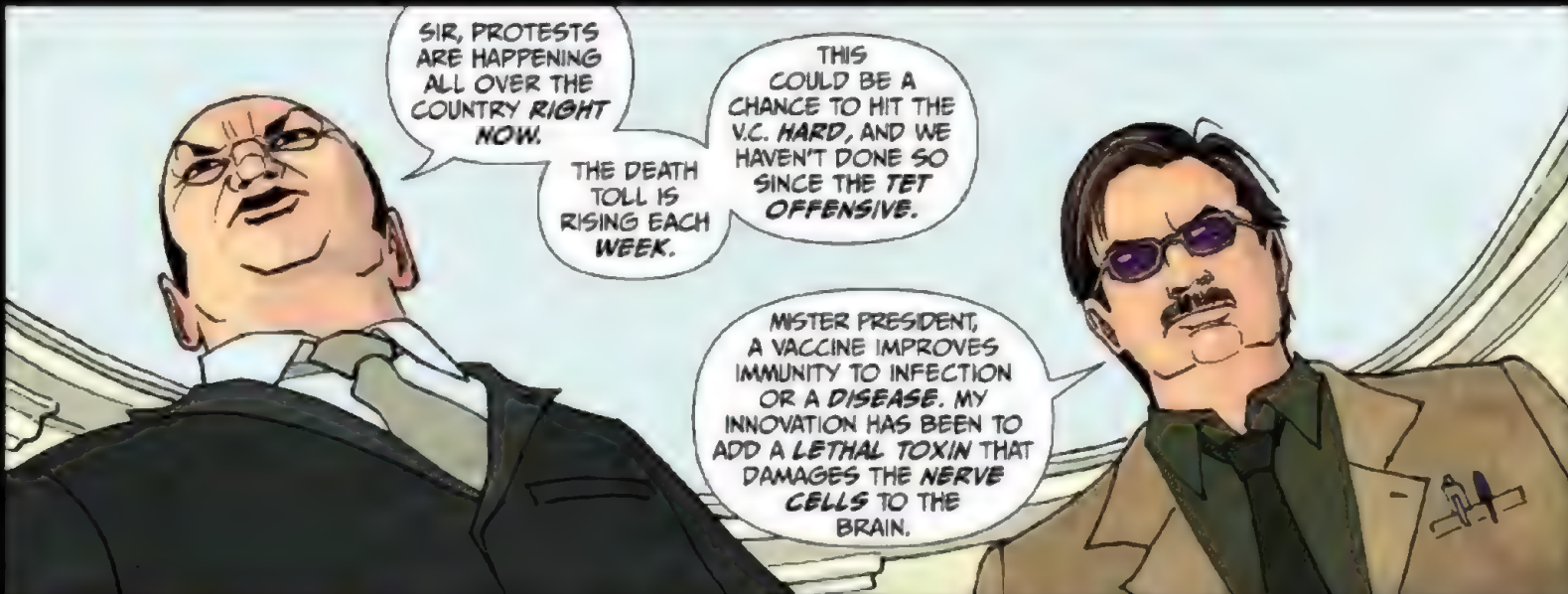
GL: Life always has ups and downs. So, I would say, learn from the mistakes you make and use them as your drive to get on. Don't always believe the hype with things, do your own thing, and be original! Never follow the crowd, always believe in yourself and your work. Never give up!

JD: You need to have staying power and determination. Some lucky (and talented) creators' careers follow a perfect upward trajectory, but for many, a life in comics can be a series of ups and downs. Be prepared to hang on in there and bounce back from the defeats.



13th August, The White House, Washington D.C.





CHAPTER 1

REBORN TO KILL



OLD SOLDIERS

ZEIN

DRAGON
BENILE



TRAIL



WINTER CITY



THE FELLOWSHIP
OF THE
GALLOWS



THE MIGHTY
TITAN



JINN WARRIORS



DYNAGIRL



INFINITY

**EXPERIENCE
THE ALL NEW
CLOUD 9 COMIX**

**ON IOS,
ANDROID &
KINDLE FIRE**



**CLOUD
COMIX**

A WRITTEN VIEW

Grabbing the Reader

By Douglas Owen

The email message pops open in front of me: "The deadline is now!"

The opening of a story should grab your reader and get them to sit down and take notice. Why? Because it is the first thing they see. Well, not really true. They see the cover art. Hopefully it's not something a child drew with crayons or something. But what makes a person decide to choose your book to read?

If the artwork is not there, they may still pick it up and look at the back. Maybe see the synopsis put there by your friend or editor. You could even have a little outline as well. But will that make them take it to the cashier? Not in the least.

No, what gets them to want to read your book is the first couple of pages.

So how do you make that happen? You open the book with something that will tell them they have to read it.

Look at the opening of this article. Right away, you see anxiety; a deadline is looming. What deadline? Are there any consequences if it is missed? Is there a job on the line or are their lives at stake? The only way to find out is to read on. And so we have a little hook, a little problem, right up front.

Think of a successful movie, say Star Wars. What is the opening line? "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away..." It grabs you. There is something that has not been done before in movies. A huge info dump at the start that you have to read. It sets the stage, telling you of a battle yet to come. If only you could set up your novel like that.

But you can!

Here are a few methods to power the reader right into your novel and make them want to read on.

The Threat!

"Man," said Teri, "is an endangered species."

If you read that as the first line of a huge book, would it interest you? This is the first line of the tome I read at the age of 16. This book contains 1079 pages and set me back \$19. This book is an international bestseller. Its name is Battlefield Earth.

Don't groan. The movie was terrible, but the book was a masterpiece. From the first line to the last, I was hooked by L. Ron Hubbard's look at a post-apocalyptic word world where the population of Earth was under 500,000 souls. It was genius. But... would I have read it if the first line did not set up a threat like that? Probably not.

Intriguing Emblem

Seven Dreamers

You must understand that they were not professional dreamers. Professional dreamers are highly paid, respected, much sought-after talents.

Alan Dean Foster opened his book with these words. Later, it was adapted and became one of the most successful R-rated movies of all time. The title? Alien. At first, people did not think it would survive. But to this day, it still sells. The reason? The first few lines pull the reader into a different world and promises something that had not been delivered until then. It didn't hurt that the tag line, "In space no one can hear you scream," stands out from all other science fiction horror novels.

I read the book after seeing the movie. They both are still on my “must have” list.

Shock

The head rolled across the cold stone floor and stopped at the feet of a Hobs acolyte.

Does the above line grab you? Would you be surprised if I told you it was the first line of a young adult book? Probably. Well it is, and kids love to be treated like adults. It is the first line of the second book in a series. Here is the first line of the first book in that same series:

Christine cried out in agony once again as her body convulsed with pain.

Shameless self-promotion here. The first is the very first line of my soon-to-be-released novel, A Sharp Spear Pont. The second is the first line of the already-released novel, A Spear In Flight. The lines tell the young adults that there is a lot of shock in the read. They will be treated, not like children, but as the intelligent people they are. And once they read the first chapter, the realization sets in: these novels are not bedtime stories.

Using shock is something you have to really practice. It cannot be too powerful, but it cannot be too weak. Find a balance and people will NEED to read on.

Riddle

“Sir, spare some change?” she asked.

When you hear something like that at the beginning of a story, you hope the speaker gets something. It rings out of homelessness and desperation. Such is the start of Mike Walczak’s story, Revelations. You want to know what happens next or what has caused someone to be in such a desperate state. The story contains language to make a sailor blush, but it is used correctly and with great effect.

You can find this story and many more in WordPlay 2013, published by Cedar Cave Books.

Go ahead, now. Open as many well-selling fiction books as you can find and you will see many openings following these principles. It is called “the grab” or “the hook”. Publishing leaders look for these. And knowing that they make a lot of money, you should follow their example.

Here’s another excerpt from a popular writer. Can you guess?

I always get the shakes before a drop. I’ve had the injections, of course, and hypnotic preparation, and it stands to reason that I can’t really be afraid.

This is from one of my favourite authors, taken from a book that has stood the test of time. The book is Starship Troopers. It is very different from the campy movie produced in 1997 and the technology envisioned is something beyond the capabilities of special effect artists back then.

But don’t take my word for it. Pick the book up and give it a good read. It was written in 1959 by Robert A. Heinlein.

But I digress.

Many first-time authors could have taken 200-plus words to get across the feelings supplied in the short words supplied above. Cut the work to the bone, remove the fat and leave only what you need. Engage your reader from the first few words and they will be thankful.

Remember, no one writes a strong opening on the first attempt. Not even on the tenth attempt. They just keep plugging at it until it is done. Write your story, then return to the start and make it a strong one. It may take you just as long to write an amazing opening as it did to complete the whole work, but it will be worth it.

The opening of your story is nearly—but not quite—as important as that coveted letter to your agent or publisher.

MY COMIC
NEEDS HELP!

CALL THE
COMIC DOCTOR!

**COMIC
EDITING**

STORY
DIALOGUE
SCRIPT • LAYOUTS
CHARACTER
SPELLING
GRAMMAR
PAGE/PANEL
COMPOSITION

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IV ARMAGEDDON



The Battle Begins...
August 2014

Coming to
Cloud 9 Comix

Faith Fallon Steven Pennella



By Mark Turner

Any creator will tell you that the “labor” of bringing life to their ideas is made a touch easier and that much sweeter when the stories they are working on reflect elements of their interests. Steven Pennella, creator of the graphic novel Faith Fallon, has managed to blend elements of his interest in bad girl art, gothic storytelling, horror, monsters (human and not so human), and the magic of the 40s and 50s Hollywood era all into his title. Utilizing his unique visual signature style, he has managed to craft a tale that smolders with atmosphere and evokes a sense of an era gone by. Between his work as a graphic artist/multimedia designer and illustrator, as well as his graphic novel work, Steven has also begun writing for Self Publisher! Magazine. With so much on his plate, it is a wonder that he was able to take time out of a busy schedule to give SP! the privilege of sharing about his career, the industry, Faith Fallon, creative influences, reaching his audience, and more.

SP!: FOR THOSE WHO AREN'T FAMILIAR WITH STEVEN PENNELLA, COULD YOU SHARE A BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND?

Steven Pennella: I'm a graphic artist/multimedia designer and illustrator by day and a graphic novelist by night. I graduated from The Joe Kubert School in 1985. My biggest claim to fame back then was attending the school the same time as Lee Weeks, Andy and Adam Kubert, Graham Nolan, Bart Sears, Jim Balent, Mike Wolfer, Pat and Tim Kennedy (at Archie Comics), and soooo many other talented people. Graham, Mike, the Kennedys and Jim were my roommates at different points of my time there, so I guess I can also lay claim to being a good luck charm, sort of like Peyton Manning's roommates. While I learned a lot at Kubert's, I couldn't hold a candle to them. I did not leave the school with a professional-level comic art portfolio, so I chose to concentrate on graphic design and revisit comics when I got better at them.

The last thing I needed was to hear my old-school, off-the boat, Italian family tell me what a loser I was for not getting a job. While



“Steven says he’s the guy in the red shirt. We are assuming he means the one in the background on the shore...”

I got some help from my parents to go to Kubert's, they weren't totally in my foxhole about trying to draw comics or being an artist. I think my dad was hoping I would fall on my ass, give up, buy a truck, and cut grass or go to a real school, since I was a National Honors Society kid in high school. Pursuing graphic design kept them off

my back. It seemed more real to them than drawing all day and I actually had a job. Back then, most of my classmates would have rather died than do graphics, but it made no sense to me to get a job doing something outside the creative world after spending three years at Kubert's.

SPI: SO THAT SETS UP THE NEXT STAGE OF YOUR CAREER. COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR EARLY YEARS AS A GRAPHIC DESIGNER?

Steven: I spent the summer after graduation working for a printing company that designed doctor bills. It's as exciting as it sounds,

removed and it became a store manager/sales position. I didn't want to be a salesman. It was a case of bait and switch. I took the bait, but refused to switch. There was no point in working 60 hours, six or seven days a week, doing something I hated.

After that debacle, I decided to take my chances as a freelancer and pursue some work in comics as a career. Since you've never heard of me, you can assume comics didn't go to well. Like I said, I really wasn't much of an artist back then, but I was a decent enough designer and could score some freelance gigs.

The biggest issue I faced as a young designer was not having any desktop publishing skills. Don't forget, this was the mid-1980s and the Kubert School taught old school paste-ups and mechanicals between 1982 and 1985, when I was there. I had to teach myself how to use a Mac, as well as learn all the software. I couldn't afford to purchase a Mac back then and PCs weren't suitable for DTP/graphics. I'd do my typesetting at AlphaGraphics, which sucked, because they were renting their Macs at \$50.00 an hour. I was lucky to get that much an hour as a freelancer, but I needed to produce type and body copy if I did a brochure or whatever.

Eventually, I started getting steady work as an in-house graphic designer for a financial consulting company, which was great, because I got a steady paycheck and health insurance bennies. It's sort of a dirty little secret most artists don't want you to know, but there's this thing called real life and it's not always fair. Artists tend to not think about that stuff, but a real job comes in handy when you fail to conquer the world, the rent is due, or you get sick, or the guy at the register wants you to pay for the movie ticket or the burger.

SPI: WITH THAT BACKGROUND, I AM SURE THAT YOU COULDN'T HELP BUT DABBLE IN THE COMICS INDUSTRY. WHAT HAPPENED IN THE COMICS WORLD?

Steven: I had some opportunities, but they never panned out. I did write and draw a "Battle Album" for Joe Kubert during my last year at the school. It was a two-page biography of General Billy Mitchell and he bought it from me and the guy who inked it, Mark Pennington. It was payable upon publication—Woo Hooo! I actually almost got paid to draw a comic book and then, just like a VH1 special about Leif Garrett or Motley Crue—minus the booze and babes—tragedy struck. Joe left his editorial duties on Sgt. Rock and it never saw print and I never got a check. I never got the originals back, either. This isn't a knock on Joe. I knew the situation and went in with both eyes open and my rose-colored glasses still in their case. The biggest disappointment about that whole situation was telling my friends and anyone who would listen about how the story was coming out. I learned a lot about who my friends were after that.

I did color a back-up story for Joe that was published in Sgt. Rock



honest. I left to take a job doing market comps for a custom furniture designer, which was kind of strange, because I wasn't an architect, but I could draw a convincing representation of a room with furniture in it. I left that job the day the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded. It wasn't a good fit, as it turned into more of a sales position than a designer position. Back then, I couldn't sell cocaine to the '86 Mets and it became obvious the proprietor was only interested in hiring a lackey to do everything: run the store, pay the bills, do some sketches, and occasionally assemble and deliver small pieces of furniture. Little by little, the art aspect was

issue 408, but it didn't bring in any other jobs from Marvel or DC—or anyone, for that matter. I was part of a Charlton Comics reboot in 1986, but the book never saw the light of day. I hear it may be published this year, but my contributions will not be included, as I was a colorist and my work was lost. No harm, No foul. I'm still friends with the guy who got it going, even though it didn't work out for me. The last decent shot at mainstream comics I had was thanks to Archie Goodwin. I met him around 1988 or '89 and he was interested in seeing some of my work for his Epic Comics line, but he left Marvel and Epic about 12 seconds after he saw my work. I was in touch with him afterwards, but he couldn't offer me anything. It was what it was.

SP!: SO, WOULD YOU SAY THAT GRAPHIC DESIGN WORK PROVIDES YOU WITH ENOUGH OF A CREATIVE OUTLET?

Steven: Creative is as creative does in the commercial art world. Years ago, I designed a Marvel Comic t-shirt and the hang tags for a company. The shirts were advertised in Marvel Comics in the 80s. I was pretty much told how many webs to put on Spider-Man's head. I had to follow the Marvel House style. Funny thing about that whole situation is that the manufacturer ended up using my initial Marker comp as final artwork, not the version done with India ink and brush on Bristol board. So much for creativity, but at least I can die saying I drew Spider-Man and got paid for it. Yay! Some kid wore my shirt and stuck the hang tag on his wall, next to his Heather Locklear poster.

Graphic design turned out to be a decent career. I've done a lot of agency and in-house work for various and sundry corporations. The majority of my career was spent as an in-house designer for financial services companies. I also worked for computer consultants, created litigation graphics and storyboards, and I worked for many small design agencies. I even had a brief stint with a popular soft drink company. I got to sit next to life-size cut outs of Britney Spears and Sammy Sosa (when he was juiced). There was an actual full-size Yoda figure from Lucasfilm LTD in the room next to the designer's bullpen.

Today, I work for a private consulting firm. I do presentations, infographics, audio and video editing, and some web work. I manage our image library, produce presentation templates, and I create info/commercial comics for our clients. As far as creativity, it's up to the buyer or client to decide what is "good" or creative. I'm providing a service. It's no different than going into Marvel or Archie and following the house style. I will say that my employer is top-notch and allows me to try new things.

SP!: AFTER THE INITIAL EXPERIENCE WITH THE COMICS WORLD, WHAT BROUGHT YOU BACK?

Steven: I'm just visiting during my off-hours. I never lost the bug to draw one, but I knew the big publishers weren't a viable option

for me. I stopped reading and collecting comics in 1992. I barely paid attention to them between 1987 and the early 2000s. It wasn't until the early 2000s, until I noticed different trade paperbacks and graphic novels in the local Barnes and Noble that caught my interest. I liked the Alex Maleev stuff on Daredevil and Brian Bendis's work. I really enjoyed his Torso graphic novel. I started to see more indy comics, thanks to the internet. The fact that you can use social media and POD and the web to produce comics made my decision to revisit that much easier.

I was impressed with the better paper quality and the full color work I saw. I read about how some artists were using Adobe prod-



ucts to make their comics. I know my way around Adobe, as well as other vector and bitmap programs, and I know about print and web production. I figured there was a possibility to use what I learned as a graphic designer and produce a graphic novel someday. Without boring everyone, let's flash forward to 2010. The Kubert School had an open house, which I attended. While I was at the open house I saw a lot of artwork from past and current students and I got the bug to start drawing comic-style art again. I hadn't done much, if any, drawing between 1987 and 2010, unless it was for a design gig, but I wasn't intimidated by the work I saw. I knew I

could at least hold serve and create something interesting. It seems like that break from comic art helped me get better at it. I had a better handle on design, narrative, and typography. All of my little graphic arts tricks served me well. I guess I'm a late bloomer.

SP!: SO, WHEN DID YOU START DRAWING FAITH FALLON?

Steven: Believe it or not, the story is based on an assignment I did as a second-year student at the Kubert School, waayyyy back in 1984. Joe Kubert has us create characters in six different genres. Faith Fallon was created as part of that assignment, but she was known as Nicole St. Onze at the time. It was pretty much the same: famous actress sup-

SP!: COULD YOU DESCRIBE FAITH FALLON (THE PROTAGONIST OF YOUR GRAPHIC NOVEL)?

Steven: Faith Fallon was America's Sweetheart during the fabulous fifties. Men wanted her, women wanted to be her. The story follows her life, from when she was a little girl growing up in Kansas during the Great Depression, to her apparent suicide in the 1960s as her career went south, and her "life" after that incident. Faith suffered a fate worse, or perhaps better, than death and didn't commit suicide, despite what people think. The story deals with her choices in life and afterlife, and the consequences of her actions, past and present. As the story progresses, she realizes how the world still worships her and is pleasantly surprised to see that she's worth more dead than alive. People buy her DVDs and memorabilia. She's histrionic, self-centered, and selfish. She desires nothing but fame. She could be the subject of Steely Dan's song, Show Biz Kids, "Show biz kids making movies of themselves, you know they don't give a f*ck about anybody else."

SP!: NOW, THE TITLE FAITH FALLON JUST OOZES A KIND OF HOLLYWOOD NOIR. IN TERMS OF THE STORY, WERE THERE ANY LITERARY INFLUENCES THAT HELPED YOU SHAPE THE TONE FOR THE TITLE? VISUALLY, WERE THERE ANY FILMS THAT INSPIRED THE LOOK? HOW WOULD YOU CATEGORIZE THE TITLE IN TERMS OF GENRE?

Steven: Faith Fallon's story starts off in a Hollywood Noir feel and ventures into the worlds of horror, fantasy, and satire. It's a compilation of many genres. Believe it or not, there's inspiration from a variety of stories, from Star Wars, to the Wizard of Oz, to Elmer Gantry, and that's just to name a few.

Visually, I wanted to try and do something different with black-and-white art, but there's no one comic artist or illustrator I'm trying to mimic. I am inspired by the black-and-white work of Virgil Finley, but I am not worthy of shining his shoes. He is absolutely amazing and he did all that stuff without creating digital brushes.

If I had to name a literary influence as far as setting the tone of the story, I'd give kudos to Eastman and Laird's original Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles comics. I thought their original concept was an excellent parody of many popular ideas in the comic book world of the 80s, but unlike traditional parody or satire, they played it straight. I plan on doing the same, while I poke some fun at Hollywood celebrity, various genres, the media, and those who look for power and glory, consequences be damned.

SP!: THE TITLE HAS A VERY UNIQUE VISUAL SIGNATURE. DO YOU USE PHOTO REFERENCE? CAN YOU TALK A BIT ABOUT YOUR PROCESS, HOW YOU CREATE YOUR IMAGES?

Steven: Would you ask Col. Sanders to give up the secret recipe? I actually find people describing their processes about as interesting



posedly committed suicide but something happened to her (insert scary music here, followed by sounds of thunder and lightningJ).

I actually wrote a screenplay about Faith Fallon in 2000. It wasn't great, but it helped to make the story much better, since I got all the crap out of it. Comic-wise, Faith started out as a series of color and black-and-white drawings, which I posted on my Facebook page beginning in 2010. Eventually, I added a few narrative pages. I decided to go the black-and-white route in May of 2012, once I had the story fully plotted out. It was a better fit than color.

as watching Sarah Palin attempt to make a cogent argument about anything. I will say that I do use as photographic reference for backgrounds or to base certain characters on different people. Outside of initial thumbnail sketches and rough pencils that I scan into the 'puter, I produce all of the work digitally. If you want to know more, ask the NSA.

SPI: CURRENTLY, YOU ARE RELEASING THE TITLE DIGITALLY ONLINE. ANY PLANS FOR THE STORY SEEING PRINT?

Steven: Once I get the first four or five issues completed, I will post them on POD sites as individual 24-page comics. I'll probably use Ka-Blam and IndyPlanet at first, but I'll explore other options, as well. Once the entire story is done, I plan to release it as a self-contained graphic novel via a POD service, like CreateSpace. I'll take advantage of whatever options available to me.

I may run a Kickstarter campaign as well. I'm weighing the pros and cons of crowd funding. I've read some good things and some bad things, and I know a few guys who succeeded, failed miserably, or worse, hit the goal and then some and still lost money. The last thing I want is to end up spending more than I take in. At least with POD, there are minimal—if any—upfront costs.

SPI: AS AN INDY CREATOR, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES THAT YOU FACE?

Steven: The biggest challenge is not wasting money and time. I have to invent time to work on this project, as it is. I simply do not have the time to promote the heck out of Faith Fallon as well. I will not waste my money on social media "experts" and their false promises of traffic up the wazoo if you pay them up the aforementioned wazoo. It doesn't work. I keep my blog going; I tweet and try to take advantage of social media. I prefer to depend on organic search, word-of-mouth, and interviews like this, and hopefully, the word will spread.

I would hate to see Faith get lost in a sea of indy comics, but I only have so much time in a day. I work full time and I have my family. I don't work on Faith during the weekends. That's family time. I don't want my kids to remember me as some self-centered goof that drew all the time and never did things with them. Luckily, I don't have a deadline, but I promise not to take as long to finish it as Quinn and Vigil did to complete Faust: Love of the Damned, which was worth the wait.

I find it a challenge to write a story about someone who really isn't likeable as a person but no one cares because she's famous and good looking and they aren't personally involved in her life. She's a media creation and people love to live vicariously through celebrity. Men want her, women want to be her.

SPI: IN TERMS OF THE TITLE, WILL FAITH FALLON BE AN ONGOING

SERIES OR HAVE A DEFINITE ENDING?

Steven: This is Episode One: Faith and Media. It's not meant to be an ongoing series. If Faith Fallon takes off, I could produce a sequel, but at the same time, it wouldn't be something I feel has to happen. Always leave then wanting more, I say. Still, nothing would make me happier than to see Faith become America's Sweetheart in the real world, as well as the comic book world she inhabits. I can assure you, she feels the same way. Again, there are only so many hours in a day, so I may end up being the J.D. Salinger or Harper Lee of indy graphic novels. This might be my one and only creation.



SPI: COULD YOU SHARE WHAT INSPIRED THIS STORY? WHY DID YOU FEEL THE NEED TO TELL IT?

Steven: The main inspiration is based on how I see people worship celebrity in this country. Faith is loved for her work, but she's not exactly someone you want to be friends with. Love the art, not the artist. I'm sure a lot of people got to meet a favorite ball player, comic artist, or movie star, and they turned out to be a total douche. This is her biography; her story from famous to infamous.

The second inspiration is more personal. There's still a part of me

that wanted to be a professional comic artist and it didn't happen. Other things got in the way and I accept responsibility for that, but I feel like I need to do it. Maybe it's a mid-life crisis or maybe I'm finally comfortable doing this. I'm treating this like a fine art project, art for art's sake; it's for me first, but I'm sure people will enjoy my vision.

SPI: THE STORY UNFOLDS OVER THE COURSE OF A NUMBER OF ERAS. WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE OF TELLING A STORY OF SUCH SCOPE?

Steven: Keeping track of the timeline and trying to get a feel for the dialects and slang of the times is a huge challenge. The story

nudity, as well as sexual situations but it is not exploitation or porn. It's not for kids; I don't let my children look at it and you shouldn't let your kids look at it, either. I need to strike a balance between artistic integrity and what can actually be accepted by on-line POD publishers and other webcomic sites. I don't want to end up getting chased or harassed by a bunch of holier-than-thou evangelical kooks or some crazy mom who gets upset because her kid saw it. Faith Fallon is not for kids. I spent a lot of this past year reworking many pages, because they were over the top with the sexual content, gore, and nudity. I think I hit the right balance.

SPI: ANY INDUSTRY CREATORS WHO HAVE HELPED INFLUENCE YOU CREATIVELY?

Steven: I cannot say enough about Arlen Schumer, comic historian and artist extraordinaire. He is a friend, a mentor, and a big reason I got off my butt and decided to do the series. Back in 2010-11, I started to post my comic art on my personal Facebook page, which led to posting some of the current Faith Fallon pages beginning in May of 2012.

Arlen would "like" the art on Facebook and he left some really nice comments. He thought it was Chanderesque and had a bit of Steranko to it. I was flattered. I never thought I would be put into the same company as those two giants by anyone, let alone him. Arlen kept commenting on the Faith Fallon work as I put new pages up and he asked to see more.

I spent a day at his studio in August of 2012 and he was very positive. Arlen's an Emmy-winning artist who worked for Neal Adams. He's seen the best comic artwork on the planet and forgotten more about the art form than most people will ever remember, and he really liked my stuff. He told me he really thought I was breaking new ground with my use of black-and-white/grey tones in modern-yet-classic comic art. I was floored.

SPI: FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, HE ALSO GAVE YOU A BIT OF A PUSH. HOW ELSE HAS HE HELPED YOU?

Steven: At his behest, I started showing Faith Fallon pages at comic cons. I hadn't attended a comic convention since 1993—and that was because I'd wanted to meet Tim Vigil back then and no other reason. The first show I went to was ComicCONN in Trumbull, CT, back in August of 2012.

I went with Arlen and he introduced me to some artists and told them to take a look. They were positive, but I wanted to see if the reaction was the same if I presented the work myself without him there. It was intimidating, but I finally got the nerve to ask Michael Golden what he thought. I figured I may as well ask a master of the art and start at the top. He liked it and was really great to talk to. I went to the NYCC Comic Con in New York in October of 2012 and did the same thing. Again, to my surprise, Faith Fallon was



takes place between the mid-1920s and the present day. I think I'll have an easier time of it when the story moves to the 80s and through the present. The art style changes with each period. It's subtle. Things I do in the pages being shared here do not necessarily translate well in other parts of the story. The story is told in a non-linear fashion, lots of flashbacks and flash forwards. There are things that aren't answered right away or may appear confusing, but it all works out in the end. I trust my audience to follow her story.

My other challenge is to know when to pull back. This isn't a G-rated Disney story. It's a hard R for sure. There is plenty of violence and

well-received by the artists I shared the work with.

SP!: WERE YOU ABLE TO GET ANY OTHER CREATORS TO GIVE YOU FEEDBACK?

Steven: Charles D. Chenet, George O'Connor, and Simon Fraser were all very helpful in their feedback. George was critical, but in a good way, as was Simon. I took their advice to heart and I think the book will be soooooo much better than it would've been. Some of my old schoolmates like Rick Arthur and Jack Pollack also provided encouragement and advice. There are many artists on Facebook that offer kudos and critiques. Artists will offer advice if you ask, just don't be a pest about it and don't bitch if they tell you the work needs work.

SP!: SINCE WE ARE ON THE TOPIC OF CONVENTIONS, ARE THERE ANY INTERESTING STORIES YOU CAN SHARE?

Steven: Here's one for you. While I was at NYCC 2012, I decided to show Faith Fallon to a famous cartoonist I met when I was a 19-year-old kid during the summer of 1983. I showed him my portfolio from my first year at Kubert's back then. It didn't go well. He told me my work really sucked. I still hear him telling me how I couldn't draw to save my life and he didn't think I ever would learn how to because it was unfathomable to him how a person could start drawing in the third grade, spend a year at Kubert's, and still produce the garbage I produced.

So there I was, 30 years later, and I asked Mr. Famous to take a look. Obviously, he didn't recognize me and I played it cool. He rolled his eyes, because I'm sure he gets sick of people asking for his critique. I told him I would appreciate it and it was OK to tell me I sucked, because I wasn't looking to break into Marvel or DC and I already had a nice career as a graphic artist. All I wanted was the opinion of an artistic peer. I think the peer thing startled him. He looked through the pages and stopped cold and then I saw a smile. He loved it. I knew he wasn't bullshitting me. He liked the indy vibe to it and said he had never seen anything like it. I think it's best to leave him nameless for now, but I have to thank him for being so honest back in '83. While I didn't graduate with a professional cartoonist portfolio, I was more honest with my own work during my second and third year at Kubert's. I left a Kubert's a less-sucky artist because of him and worked a lot harder at it than I might have otherwise.

SP!: HAVE YOU FOUND ANY THINGS YOU SHARE IN COMMON WITH OTHER INDEPENDENT ARTISTS YOU'VE MET?

Steven: Hell, yes! Independent artists can relate to how hard it is to find a work/life balance and produce a graphic novel at the same time without some huge corporate citizen backing it. It's refreshing to see other artists deal with the same things I go through. I work

on Faith Fallon as often as I can, between a full-time job as a graphic artist/multimedia designer, and I have a wonderful wife and three kids, ages 6, 4, and 1. When I was a kid, I always assumed comic artists made a lot of money and lived a glamorous life. It was nice to hear that other guys my age, younger, or older have a day job, a mortgage, kids, family issues that require money, and live in the real world.

SP!: ARE YOU CURRENTLY READING ANYTHING THAT HELPS KEEP YOUR LEVEL OF INSPIRATION UP?

Steven: I'm not really reading much in the comic book world right



now. I have a few books by Dean Haspiel, whom I met through Arlen Schumer. I'm trying to not look at too many graphic novels. I generally don't buy comics by the single issue. I usually wait for the trade paperback to come out, but lately, I spend virtually no time reading comics. Real life gets in the way.

SP!: ONE OF THE MAXIMS OF THE COMIC CREATING PROCESS IS "KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE". WHO WOULD YOU SAY THE PRIMARY AUDIENCE FOR FAITH IS?

Steven: My primary audience is anyone 18 and over that appreciates a well-crafted story. Fans of original content on Cable or HBO,

such as American Horror Story, Walking Dead, or True Detective will like Faith Fallon.

SP!: TO ACHIEVE THIS END, WHAT METHODS/VENUES DO YOU USE TO REACH THAT DEMOGRAPHIC?

Steven: One of the methods I use is showing pages to people NOT into comics to see what they think. It seems counterintuitive, but I am getting a lot of positive feedback, if not stronger feedback, from non-comic people versus fans of comics. I have a lot of friends who enjoy The Walking Dead or films like Cronenberg's A History of Violence, Snyder's 300, and Mendes' Road to Perdition, and had no clue they were adapted from comic books. People love a good story and I hope to give them one. Other than that, I blog, tweet, and share on Facebook, but that's beginning to be useless, since they are throttling posts unless you pay for them. I guess Zuckerberg decided to f*ck the cool aspect of Facebook and buy advertising for Mountain Dew, after all.

SP!: OUTSIDE OF YOUR WORK ON FAITH, YOU'VE ALSO STARTED WRITING FOR SP! MAGAZINE. WHAT FUELED THIS DECISION?

Steven: Ian promised to sell all the dirty pictures he has on me to TMZ after Faith Fallon makes it big. Actually, he thought it would be a good fit. Considering my second interview ended up being the cover story, I'd say he's right.

SP!: AS A CREATOR, WHAT BENEFITS DO YOU FEEL CAN COME FROM PARTICIPATING IN THIS KIND OF WORK? ULTIMATELY, DO YOU FEEL IT CAN HELP YOUR WORK AS A COMIC/GRAPHIC NOVEL CREATOR?

Steven: Writing for SP! Magazine will help to create an awareness of Steven Pennella, which in turn helps create an interest in Steven Pennella's work. This can only help Faith Fallon. I'm confident this gig will help me as a creator when it comes to Faith and even with stoking my creativity at my day job. I'll do it as long as I have fun with it.

SP!: WHERE CAN FANS FIND YOUR WORK AND ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON ANY OTHER PROJECTS THAT FOLKS SHOULD KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR?

Steven: Faith Fallon is the only graphic novel/comic-related work I'm doing right now. The first issue is available at selffy.com and here's a link that offers the .pdf for half off—only \$1.00!

<http://selffy.com/p/dpCF/-08021962/>

Faith Fallon's available on Patreon.com which lets people support creators by becoming patrons. Unlike other fundraising sites, which raise funds for a single big event, Patreon is for creators who create a stream of smaller works. If anyone wants to check it out, the link is here: <http://www.patreon.com/spenn> and you'll get to see the work

in progress and help an artist out.

Otherwise you can find me at:

Faithfallon.com, the official website.

Faithfallon.me, which is an older blog, but still gets updated.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/FaithFallonGraphicNovel>

YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/FaithFallonArt

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/faithfallonart>

Tumblr: <http://faithfallon.tumblr.com/>

<http://issuu.com/ctspenn/docs/ffallon> has an online version of an older, unedited, five-page preview of Faith Fallon.

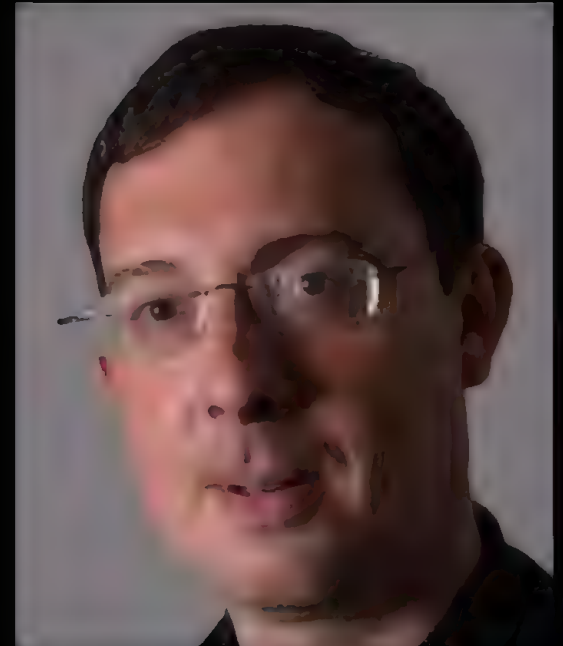
<http://www.slideshare.net/ctspenn> has some other artwork that I've done. It's not Faith Fallon, but it's still interesting.



Digital Dialogues

A Talk with

Todd Allen



By Ellen Fleischer

Todd Allen is no stranger to digital media. He currently works as a digital and interactive consultant and has written on business and technology for several major publications. He's taught eBusiness at the college level and wrote a webcomic for a time. He has written about the comics business for Publishers Weekly, CBR, and The Beat, and has served as contributing editor for the latter. He is the author of *The Economics of Digital Comics* (later re-titled *The Economics of Web Comics*), and has just successfully funded the publication of its third edition via Kickstarter.

Todd was happy to talk to us this month about his work with digital publishing, his webcomic, and his forthcoming book.

SPI: CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND? ARE THERE ANY EXPERIENCES THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE THAT YOU CONSIDER TO BE FORMATIVE?

TA: BS in Communications with a concentration in EE/CS from Northwestern. MA in Internet Business & Media Convergence from NYU.

Mostly, I'm a digital/interactive consultant. A mix of interactive agencies and non-profits. The client list includes the American Medical Association, National PTA, TransUnion, Navistar and McDonald's. Five years teaching eBusiness courses at Columbia College Chicago as an adjunct professor. Two or three courses per semester for the bulk of that. I spent 2013

contracted with Aerbook, a digital publishing startup, ending with a contract as Director of Product.

I've moonlighted as a journalist quite a bit over the years. Business and technology coverage for the Chicago Tribune, The Next Web, and Startup Grind. I was a humor columnist and NBA/WNBA columnist for New York Resident, a Manhattan weekly. I've covered the comics business and its intersection with technology for Publisher's Weekly, The Beat, and Comic Book Resources. During my time as a contributing editor to the Beat, it's been nominated for an Eisner Award and named to TIME's top 25 websites of 2012 list.

SPI: YOU'VE BEEN WRITING ABOUT DIGITAL COMICS FOR WELL OVER A DECADE. HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INTERESTED IN COMICS IN GENERAL AND DIGITAL COMICS IN PARTICULAR?

TA: Comics have been around me as long as I can remember. I can remember when I was a small child, my mother having me read a Dick and Jane book to her. Then I went back to a Batman comic, which was more interesting. I became interested in the business side and the digital side because, when I got out of undergrad, comics were barreling into the 90s downturn and the first dotcom boom was in full swing. Comics were, by and large, ignoring the emerging digital channel and poisoning their distribution network. Part of why I've always been interested in documenting this

The Economics of Web Comics, 2nd Edition



A Study in Converting Content into Revenue

Todd Allen

is that so creators know what their options are when the market cycles turn against the mainstream publishers. There's no question that there are cycles to this.

SPI: IN ADDITION TO WRITING ABOUT DIGITAL COMICS, YOU'VE PUBLISHED ONE OF YOUR OWN. WHAT CAN YOU SHARE WITH US ABOUT DIVISION & RUSH?

TA: The Chicago Tribune became alarmed when the Huffington Post started up a Chicago-based sub-site. The Tribune Media Group (which I gather has shifted into a slightly

different entity in the last year) decided to launch a blog site called "Chicago Now" to try and compete with HuffPo for local bloggers. I'm not sure if you'd put me at the very end of the first wave or early in the second wave, but I was approached by one of the editors about doing a comic strip for them. Len Strazewski was originally approached, but he wasn't available and referred them to me.

After a bit of negotiation, we settled on format and I arranged to bring Scott Beaderstadt into the mix as our artist. Scott's probably best known for Trollords, which was probably the second most popular indy comic to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles back in the indy boom of the mid-to-late 80s. I should probably note that when they were launching the property, Chicago Now's content was curated and they

paid a monthly retainer. It was very different than it is now. This was also a site that was run on an advertising/page views model, so I was constructing a comic with that specifically in mind, which isn't the normal first priority with webcomics.

The strip, while a bit of an unusual path, qualified me for membership in the Mystery Writers of America.

We did it for around a year, at which point the financial model changed to only paying for page views local to the Chicago Market. We'd had some technical issues shoehorning a comic strip into the Typepad platform they were using, and discoverability issues on top of the fact that the audience for the strip wasn't primarily Chicago-based, so we pulled the strip over to a solo site for a bit. It went on hold when my position at Columbia College was eliminated, although we keep meaning to get around to finishing it. There's at least one more chapter's script in the can. The comics are still up at www.divisionandrush.com.

SP: YOU'VE ALSO ASSISTED ORGANIZATIONS OF A DECIDEDLY NON-COMICS BENT, INCLUDING THE AMA AND THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN PUBLISHERS, WITH BRINGING THEIR PRINT BRANDS TO THE DIGITAL WORLD. WHAT WOULD YOU CONSIDER THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT(S) OF PROJECTS LIKE THESE?

TA: The challenge is retain enough of the "feel" of the print brand while fitting it into the wider world of digital. The navigation is a little different and it's not all about this month's issue. Back issues and old articles mean you need to spend a little more time organizing content categories and how the archives are accessed. Adding some interactive elements. Getting the news updates on the site without undermining the flow of the print edition. That was a little different with medical journals or anything peer-reviewed. Studies can be breaking news if they're big enough, but not always.

These days, the print and digital roles are sometimes swapped and the print is trying to capture the feel of the digital, but without the

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immediacy. It can be a balancing act. It's certainly trickier if you're trying to move a suite of journals with separate identities and fit them all under the same umbrella.

SP!: YOU'VE DONE QUITE A BIT OF DIGITAL CONSULTING WORK. WHAT DOES THAT INVOLVE? FOR WHAT SORTS OF PROJECTS WOULD CLIENTS TYPICALLY INVOLVE YOU?

TA: I'm a generalist and troubleshooter, so it varies quite a bit. I think the most unusual consulting I've ever done was managing the production of interactive exhibits for trade shows. Some of it was making games related to the product that people could play in the booths. I spent a good week trying to find a way to cater In 'n' Out Burger to the San Diego Convention Center and interviewed magicians for a booth promotion.

For the most part, I drop into the middle of a project, figure out what's gone wrong, fix the product design if there's something amiss, and then get it built. A lot of the time it's marketing. Sometimes it's strategy. I spent most of 2013 working on a digital comics product and prototyping a color Print On Demand solution.

SP!: HAVE YOU FOUND ANY CHALLENGES THAT SEEM TO BE UNIQUE (OR AT LEAST, MORE COMMON) TO DIGITAL COMICS, VERSUS OTHER ONLINE PUBLICATIONS?

TA: I used digital comics to teach channel conflict when I was an eBusiness professor. It should be the textbook example. While things have calmed down a bit, for years, the comic book store direct market retailers were convinced that digital comics would destroy their business and the publishers were afraid to

move very far into the field. It turns out that the print market and the digital market were growing at the same time, so that's turned out not to be the case. Largely because the print market had already lost the newsstand and was primarily a collector's market. We're still seeing digital comics priced identically to print because of retail fears. In fairness, if discounts did move another 20 percent of the business to digital, that could cause some hiccups in the print system, but there's not much by way of experimenting with that, past back issue discounts.

SP!: ANY PARTICULARLY MEMORABLE INCIDENTS OR ANECDOTES?

TA: Marvel actually shut down their original dotComics program, from whence the technical co-founder of Comixology came. My understanding is that this was over internal concerns about cannibalizing the print market. Even if that wasn't the real reason, Marvel could've owned digital comics, but they ran off the technical backbone of Comixology and Amazon recently bought him. Oops.

SP!: WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE THE ECONOMICS OF DIGITAL COMICS (LATER RE-TITLED THE ECONOMICS OF WEB COMICS)?

TA: This all spun out of my Master's Thesis at NYU. I was in the Gallatin school, which is all individually-designed programs. I was studying Internet Business & Media Convergence. (Henry Jenkins hadn't coined the phrase "transmedia" when I started the program.) Essentially, I was assembling a more relevant version of an MBA—a little out of Stern's actual MBA program, a Media Ecology course here, a couple Interactive Telecommunications courses there, a big scoop of the Publishing program, and so forth. When it came time to write a thesis, my topic was content monetization and I've always been more interested in actual figures than widgets. I had enough connections to dig up real numbers on comics and use that as a subset of online content.

After I graduated, it was suggested I revise it and turn it into a book. I'm on the third edition.



SPI: THE PREVIOUS EDITION WAS PUBLISHED IN 2007. WHY PUBLISH A NEW EDITION NOW? HOW MUCH HAS THE INDUSTRY CHANGED IN THE LAST SEVEN YEARS?

TA: I actually started on the update in 2010. I was spending about half my time teaching eBusiness at Columbia College Chicago and I'd planned to work on it in between consulting projects. Unfortunately, the Part-Time Faculty Union and the Columbia administration got into a huge fight over the next contract for the part-timers. I ended up being in a group of one hundred adjunct faculty who were eliminated after the Winter semester. As that storm was brewing, and I had seen it coming, I ended up having to put a hold on the update. Since then, I've always had a project pop up before I've been able to complete an update. I was getting close at the end of 2012, but I ended up contracting with a startup that took up most of my waking hours. (The stories you hear about Bay area startup hours are true.) Part of the reason I did a Kickstarter was to carve out some time and make myself commit to finishing the update.

The two biggest changes from 2007 are digital downloads/ebooks and crowdfunding.

In 2007, micropayments hadn't really come of age and credit card minimums were still a thing. We didn't really have anything in the ebook category like Comixology, so a whole side of the business didn't exist.

The other thing that didn't exist is crowdfunding. Crowdfunding isn't really something you start out with as a business model. It doesn't work so well if you don't already have some kind of following, but it's a possible end-game. On the Kickstarter side, you've got Order of the Stick with over a million dollars for its campaign. There's a newer site called Patreon that essentially does crowdfunding as reoccurring monthly payments. The webcomics poster child over there is SMBC, which is getting well over \$8,000 each month from pledges. If you can develop the audience, crowdfunding can help you pay for your time.

SPI: WHO IS YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE FOR THIS BOOK?

TA: There are a few distinct audiences.

- People looking for an understanding of how the comics market works
- Cartoonists looking for a survey of digital monetization tools and how the ecosystem fits together
- An underserved academic market—the last edition was taught at SCAD and I had a long Skype last week with a grad student in Scotland working on her Publishing thesis
- There's also some crossover with the tech community, particularly the content and transmedia verticals.

SPI: WHAT ARE THE MAIN POINTS THAT YOU COVER?

TA: Breaking down the history, business models and cash flow of print comics, ebooks/digital downloads, and webcomics. Contrasting how the businesses compare to each other, in terms of activity necessary to fit a professional budget. And then stepping back and taking a look at crowdfunding, which isn't really part of the day-to-day functionality of print and digital, but is increasingly used as an endgame once things are up and running.

SPI: HOW DID YOU LAND MARK WAID FOR YOUR INTRODUCTION?

TA: I've been playing trivia against Mark at the various comic conventions in Chicago since the mid-90s, so I just asked him. He's in an unusual position where he's written print comics for a very long time, but has also launched his own webcomics site. He was interested in the book and said yes.

SPI: YOU'VE SUCCESSFULLY FUNDED PUBLICATION OF THE NEW EDITION VIA KICKSTARTER. CONGRATS ON THAT! HOW ABOUT FOLK WHO DIDN'T PLEDGE TO THE CAMPAIGN? HOW WOULD THEY OBTAIN A COPY OF THE BOOK?

TA: This will be available through normal bookstore channels via Ingram/Lightning Source.

Usually Amazon is my primary sales channel, but you'll be able to order it at a brick and mortar store when it's ready. I'll be putting the eBook in the usual places.

SPI: ANY OTHER CURRENT PROJECTS? WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON?

TA: I literally put everything on hold when I setup the Kickstarter. I have some phone calls I need to return soon.

SPI: IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU'D LIKE TO ADD THAT WE HAVEN'T TOUCHED ON YET?

TA: There are a couple of things I've always found interesting. The way digital has evolved has mirrored the divide between comic strips and comic books. The comic strips jumped online first as webcomics and carved out a few more variations on the classic newspaper strip format, but with a few notable exceptions, the comic-book-style material translated over to putting a page up at a time—not so different from a Sunday comic strip. The comic books took a longer to come online and that was a combination of all the channel conflict and the ebook formats not being particularly well-suited to graphics early on. The two of them are fairly distinct entities with mostly different business models.

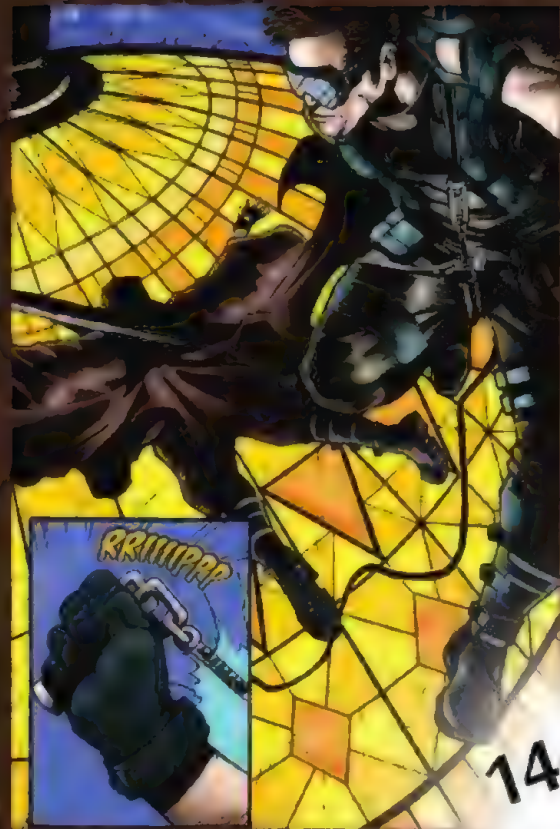
The other thing that interesting is that almost everyone comes back to print when it's time to monetize. Whether it's a comic book, a comic strip, a webcomic, or a digital-first comic ebook, everyone can sell a collected edition in print.

SPI: FINALLY, HOW CAN OUR READERS KEEP UP WITH YOU AND YOUR WORK?

TA: I'm at Publishersweekly.com and comic-sbeat.com on a regular basis. My Twitter is @Real_Todd_Allen

SPI: THANKS SO MUCH!





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BOUNTY HUNTERS ATTENTION!

WANTED

We need to make an apology and correction! In issue #75, we pictured Vinton Heuck and Bryon Peranada in the header of their article...but the picture, is not of Byron. We're not sure who it is or why we thought it was, but, we would like to show the world, the real Byron. If you see him, say hi!



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Webcomics Shop Talk

The Demands of making it work



By Travis Hanson

The other day, I was asked why I offer “The Bean” as both a webcomic and a printed piece. In fact, the question was if I thought I was sinking my own ship by offering it up for free.

Yet, in a time when indy comics are getting harder and harder to produce and get out there, there must still be an outlet for those of us that have fantastic tales to tell. Mind that Diamond is no longer really friendly to the small guys,

Too often, too many incredibly good webcomics fall by the wayside, because their creators cannot keep up with the pace or demands that they set up for themselves. Which is a shame. You see, more webcomics are truly a labor of love.

The other problem one faces is having to weed through all the crap to find the really strong stuff. With the power of the web, a story can reach a huge audience, but we forget that we are competing with many other artists trying to do the same thing. So how can you make your webcomic survive and how can you, as a struggling illustrator, manage to make a little income at the same time? Well let's break it down....

1. DEADLINES AND RELIABILITY

I cannot stress this one enough. Set realistic deadlines. Bean updates once a week, every Monday—and then, two color updates Tuesday and Thursday (I have embarked on the biggest project of my life: coloring Bean from page 1). My readers know that there will be a new part of the story on those days, they expect it, and so, I must honor that. If I keep changing the days without telling people... people lose interest. IF I MISS DAYS WITHOUT AN EXPLANATION, PEOPLE STOP READING! I see too many comic artists start missing deadlines for whatever reason and pushing the updates further back. You want to upset your readers, don't be reliable. If you want your readership to grow, update when you say you will. There are many programs out there that will let you automate this process

so you can be several weeks ahead.

2. WORK WITHIN YOUR LIMITS.

Honestly, if you can produce five colored pages a week and that's all you have to do, then updating five days a week is fine. Yet, most artists are pretty slammed, so five colored pages a week can be quite overwhelming. Work with what is realistic. My main goal is to finish my tale in black and white first, and then go back and color it (or find someone else to color it for me so I can do another tale). I realized I can produce several pages a week—between eight and ten at times—in black and white, yet I cannot do this consistently. I have other obligations and I LOVE being married and I LOVE being a dad. So, I must juggle a bit. I found that making sure I update twice a week was very workable, and now I have an 80-page buffer ready to be uploaded. Which brings me to my next point.

3. CREATE A BUFFER!

They (newspapers comics) say you should have six weeks of strips in the hopper. I am a strong believer in that. Do not try to update the same week you do that perfect page you are working on; you will only set you up for failure.

4. QUALITY OVER QUANTITY!

There are no print deadlines with webcomics except the ones you make for yourself, but keep them! Take your time, make it look good. If we can prove that there are incredibly well-written-and-drawn stories out there, more and more will flock to find them. That takes a little faith in an industry that pays artists very little. That's why I like a twice-weekly update. It allows me to take time to create a good story without feeling rushed, as well as letting me cover my other freelance jobs at the same time.

Other updates, though, are important. I love having a separate



art gallery to let my imagination go wild. It gives people something to enjoy while they wait.

5. KEEP YOUR STORY FOCUSED.

I recommend starting with an ending and then working your way to that point. It's all about direction. Epics are fine when they have a focus to reach. Side stories are fine as well, but be careful that you do not lose focus. Webcomics that lose focus, lose readers (more on story creation in another post).

6. WHY PAY SITES DON'T WORK AND THE POWER OF THE HARD COPY (for the reader).

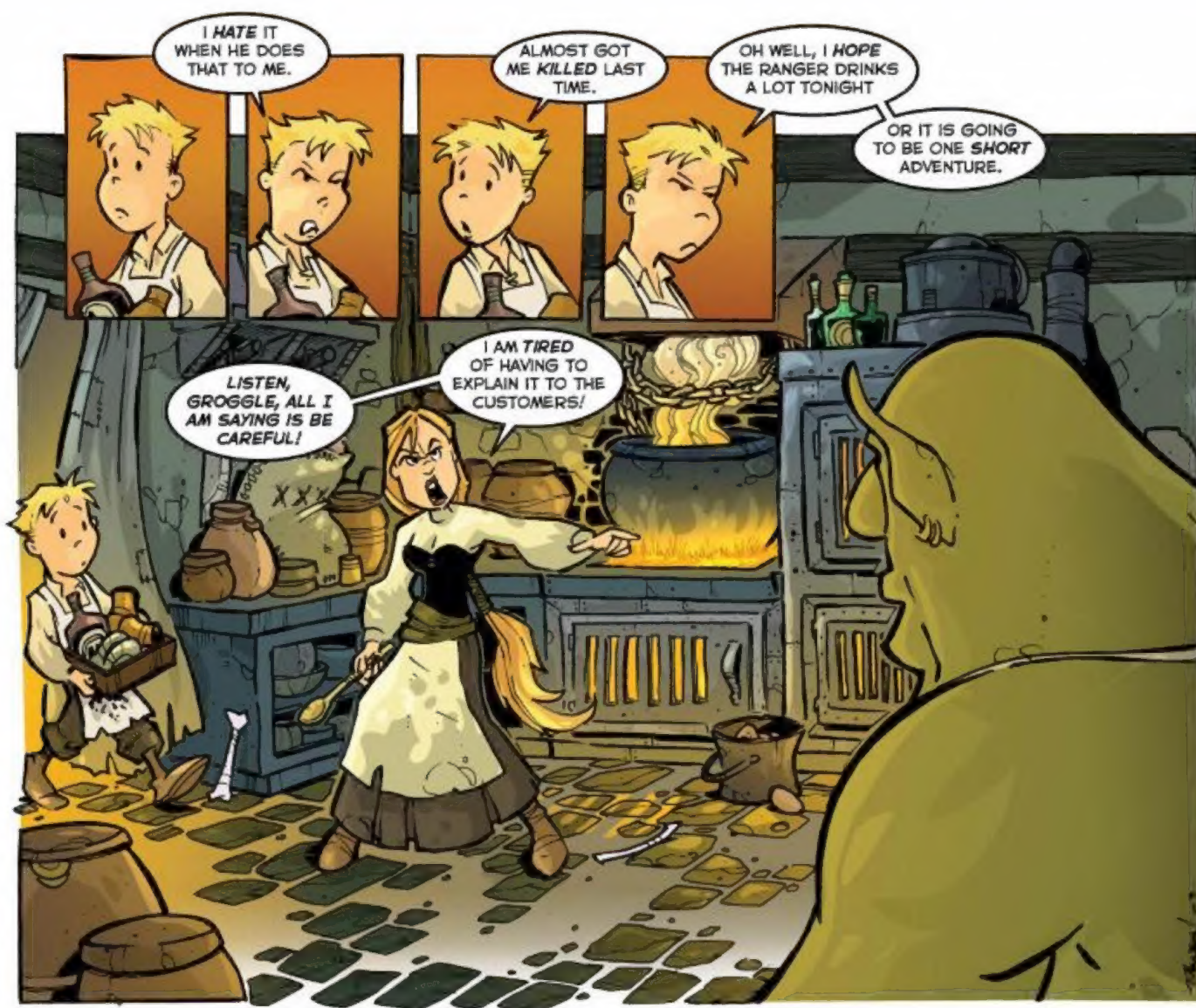
By posting our webcomics online for free, it allows a fan base to build. People from all over the world can enjoy your stuff... and yes, they get it for free. So where is the money aspect of it? If you use a site that charges admission for your work, it drives fans away and you end up making very little and risk a much smaller fan base (I have a few friends who are very talented and ran into this trap). I say, utilize the hard copy. Small print run, keep it clean and professional, and sell it online and at conventions. If your fans love your story, they will love the hard copy even more.

You still need to eat and 95 percent of webcomics are done in the evenings or late at night, as a labor of love. People do not realize how much time is put into a dream to make it a reality, and how many of us struggle to make ends meet and still produce an incredible story.

SO HERE IS THE REALITY CHECK!

A lot of people will just read the story online. You will also notice that many people promise to buy





your books, your family, your friends, etc.... but when it comes down to it, those numbers are really small. Yet, the person that finds your webcomic and takes the time to comment, returns daily, etc., will be the one that will buy the hard copy. It is the truth. Yet, you can still create income as indy... It's just learning what options are out there.

The Bean was written to be a printed story. It fits this pattern to the letter. I plan each book to be 152 pages of the online story, plus extras (maps, notes, etc...). I have three books done and I am now in the process of finishing Book 4. I make sure the cover is nice and strong and that it is something my fans would want and enjoy. It is a tribute to them, because The Bean will not always be up here. Each book has been funded by Kickstarter—and now the coloring is being funded through Patreon. These sites and our personal stores allow people to help keep our webcomic stories up and free to the masses.

When searching for comics, I am the same way; if I find a web comic that I really enjoy, I will pick up the hard copy.

7. MAKE YOUR SITE FUNCTIONAL

and use a good tracking software to see hits, etc. Unique hits are more important than regular hits. A unique hit number is a more accurate representation of how many people are reading your comic. So if your website gets 500,000 hits and has only 12 unique hits, that means only about 12 people and one might be your mom, are reading your comic. So, focus on getting the unique hits up.

8. GET YOUR NAME OUT THERE.

This is a weird one. Trends change all the time. You will find, even if your story is picked up for print, that you still have to push the advertising yourself. You will have to make contacts, you will have to come out of your shell and start meeting people. Start submitting your links, make deals with other webcomics you like (mind you, some creators are really picky what they will showcase—for me, it is quality and age-appropriate material) to host one another's links. Find time to promote someone else; you might be surprised to see the favor returned. This game, though, is always changing. Social media is changing and Facebook is not as creator-friendly as it used to be.

9. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.

I am a dad. I know what I want my kids to see online, so I make sure my work runs in that vein. I also know my audience loves reading fantasy and likes certain things, so I make sure I please my audience, while not losing the integrity of my original vision. Basically, do not sell your dream short for a few hits. If you keep true to your vision, your audience will find you.

10. HOW BAD DO YOU WANT IT?

This is my biggest thing. Do not tell me how bad you want it. Show me. Put the time into your work. What are you willing to sacrifice to make that dream work? I love video games. I rarely play them, because I would rather tell my story. Family is first, my dream is second—because my dream would be nothing if I destroyed my family in the process. Yet, I still sacrifice to make the dream happen. I love entertaining, but when they go to bed, I sit up and draw. When it fails (which Bean did three times), do you get back up and rework to make it work? Only you know. So, honestly, how bad do you want it?

These are just ten simple things that have made my world a reality. I have had so much fun creating this and I know if others are inspired to do the same, the world of webcomics will be as strong as print. Fans will come and that labor of love will pay off.

So, keep creating, keep dreaming, and keep drawing.



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